Dear Family and Friends,

February 3, 2017

Please pray for us... it's been hard lately. You hear about culture stress (often called culture shock, but it's more like a stress that comes and goes...). You listen to stories about it, you think you'll know how to cope. But the trick is that it sneaks up on you, and catches you when you don't feel a bit of glamour toward unfamiliar customs. You scramble to find your rose-colored heart-shaped glasses, but it seems your neighbor walked through the house the other day and knocked them onto the floor, where they cracked pitifully....

The mountainous scenery is still beautiful, the squalor of some barnyard homes still holds rustic appeal; you still love people, you still love God. But where you felt elastic before, now you feel brittle. You felt grounded before, now you feel aimless. You thought you'd never ask why you are here, now you do. You just feel tired. You feel your faith is emaciated, bare bones, and you need emergency sustenance. The dog ate the neighbors' guinea pigs, not a surprising thing, but costly, so the beloved Ushie has been sold across the valley...a day or two of flu, breaking down and begging my dear husband to stop correcting me every time I misconjugate a verb in Spanish...

This is Hannah writing, and for my dedicated readers who will read all of this email, details will follow. But this month we start by asking for prayer and even begging for encouragement...

Prayer Requests:
1) It is increasingly clear to us that a local church needs local leaders. It just doesn't make sense for foreigners, swamped with cross-culture barriers, to try and teach the Bible long-term. There are local Christians here. Please pray for them to grow steadily so they can lead the church!

2) Steve, along with Max from our community, are representing Ushpabamba at a church planting seminar right now. The seminar is the spearhead of a two-year curriculum for local church leaders. Please pray that the scriptural principles behind this curriculum would effectively clarify the work to be done.

3) Help! Please send us an encouraging word, a scripture, as we struggle in a period of low morale with culture stress, due in part to a low sense of privacy in our home! Please pray for us to have wisdom as we prayerfully redraw boundaries around some rooms (that is, our bedroom and possibly our kitchen) in our home-inside-the-church-building. As it is, the bathroom is an exterior building, and people easily peek into our kitchen.

Praises
1) We thank God for nearby family, a retreat into English, familiar jokes, shared culinary tastes and cultural background!
2) We also thank God that we don't have to think about getting on a plane when we want to reconnect with folks at home. The Internet and even, dare I call it, Facebook,
are a blessing in this area!

3) God continues to provide our needs. Thank you for being a part of His provision!!

4) Somehow, in the midst of culture stress, I still love the days when I'm out in the fields with our neighbors.

And now I will tell you much more of the story...

**Inner Sanctuary...**

A basic issue we're realizing in Ushpabamba is that we have serious privacy issues to resolve in our home inside the church. For fifteen years, open or closed, the building and its small piece of land have been treated like a piece of public property. Now, even our 100 sq-ft bedroom (/closet/study/private living room) is hard to keep sacred after a church meeting. The women, generously returning our hospitality of serving tea, push through our bedroom to the kitchen to do the dish washing. There's a side hallway intended for that passage, but its exit door is damaged and secured with a stack bricks and leftover construction materials. The ladies are respectful, but their kids follow, exploring the room quick as lightning, even diving under the bed the other night! Before I caught the two boys at it that night, their explorations had already rewarded them with the discovery of the colored kickballs we've hidden there (because the boys had been pounding them around the bare-bulb-lit sanctuary like pro soccer balls). They fled cackling as I chased them out like chickens that got in to the corn.

That's the violation of our most inner sanctum, our bedroom. It shouldn't matter, except that we're left feeling nothing is sacred. If we had that much, our bedroom, we'd probably be fine (of course we hope a future home will have an indoor bathroom, but that's a matter of convenience, not desperation). But by degrees everything outward from our bedroom is even less private. We're kind of the dummies, for living in a lighthouse on a hill with huge windows right next to two well-worn field pathways. It's a beautiful home and we're very very grateful! But I've noticed everybody else builds their homes high above the road, or curled into a courtyard shape facing away from the road, with only small opaque windows. (And 2/3 of their home space aren't a semi-public church sanctuary). Who wouldn't rubberneck at a couple of foreigners who live right on the beaten path with huge windows? We've curtained the windows that are low enough to be peered in, but I love tying back the kitchen side windows to have that pastoral view. Then kids come and peer in, or adults walk by slowing their steps to crane their necks. And I must say, they are always amiable! I love that about the people. In a city, even here in Cusco where I'm writing this, you more or less pretend you're alone and let everyone else pretend they're alone too. I mean, it's easy to strike up conversations. But your "at rest" mode is vague and focused on your own purpose. In the country, if a stranger walks past slowly staring, you don't just ignore him and think he's weird. Rather, you take his gesture as well-meant, and say good afternoon, and ask his name, where he lives, what he's up to, and what he thinks of this rather un-rainy rainy season. And if they're kids, they'll stay and chat a while.

I am sure God knew just what He was doing when he put us in such a visible location.
James Herriot in Peru...and the blessing of Humor

Who is a fan of James Herriot, the English veterinarian/humorous author from the 1900's? I hope you've had the chance to read some of his delightful animal stories. I'm saying this because, while I've been reading his books lately, I feel like he's writing about rural Quechua life in the Andes instead of rural farms in the highlands of Northern England! I would barely have to change his descriptions of clothing, dwellings, livestock, weather, terrain, or even superstitions, to be writing about my surroundings here.

So I feel these books touch my life here, yet completely in English--so it's a rest for my language-muddled mind. The stories remind me to let go and laugh when circumstances look bleak and uninviting. (My Grandma Esther modeled that for me, too). Let me remind my readers right now that there is nothing bleak or uninviting about our physical situation. It's beautiful, and our physical needs are met. But we're feeling stretched emotionally and spiritually. That may come down to our present struggle with privacy boundaries. We were advised ahead of time to draw good spatial boundaries. Like the newbies we are, we failed to do so. Only as my symptoms of culture shock flared up to a frenzy have I begun to pick this issue apart and find that I feel my private haven of "home" is being constantly violated by the very friendly, curious neighborhood I am growing to know and love.

I dreamed last night that my husband and I were reunited after this church-planting retreat he's at currently--at my childhood home in Indiana, of all places. We went on a walk around the yard, enjoying the solitude together. The kids we are, we started to climb an old tree behind the garage, when....I heard a piercing 6-year-old's voice call my name: "ANA-AAA!" And sure enough, there she was--a gregarious little neighbor of mine here in Ushpabamba--leading the way as a clump of all of our immediate neighbors in Ushpa poured into my parent's backyard to greet us in all friendliness and bonhomie, like the extended family from My Big Fat Greek Wedding crowding onto the screen!

Well, how could I wake up from that and not laugh at my culture stress?! We have some boundary issues to resolve and some coping mechanisms to develop, but we're living in Ushpabamba to know our neighbors, loving them with the love of Jesus. Please pray that we would be wise even as we seek to be open, bold, and generous with our time and resources.

Our dim glimpse of the incarnation experience...

What did it take for Jesus to set aside His glory and become a human being in rural, pastoral Israel 2000 years ago? We are not yet perfected as He was already perfect when He stepped into the shoes of humanity. We can only seek to imitate Him, and when the rubber meets the road, we're quickly discovering how hard it really is to lay oneself aside.

I have to swing my thinking around again to remember that our prize goal isn't to become Quechua--a humanly impossible transformation--it's to build relationships with them so that deep communication can happen. All humanity--American, Quechua,
Chinese, Russian, Basque, etc, are, well, human; we all have a lot of common ground in our sin natures and tendency toward materialism, superstition, and passiveness. So we haven't come here to become Quechua, nor to persuade the Quechuas to become North Americans. We have a set of weaknesses not quite like theirs, but we're not looking for a swap. We want to encourage them to be seated with Christ, stand on His promises, and walk in His presence day by day.

**And we beg our church community on home soil to encourage us to do the same-**

**-to rest in the work and love of Christ!** Somehow, being reminded by a brother or sister does something for the heart that just reminding ourselves can't always do.

In our situation I can't think of a more relevant Scripture than Paul's words in Philippians: "... I *don't say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content -- whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.*" - Phl 4:11-13 HCSB

While I live the simplest life I ever have, my neighbors expect/believe me to be vastly wealthy. It's true we are incredibly blessed as our daily needs are being met, and our church community has made sure we lack nothing; and yet it's true we feel poor in spirit. We beg for your uplifting prayers and encouragement. As you feel led, please send us an encouraging word or Scripture. We are confident God wants us here at this time, and we thank you so much being a support network over this distance. You are part of this ministry!

**Love in Christ,**

Steve 'n' Hannah